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SUBJECT: PRT/NURISTAN: INAUGURATION OF PRT NURISTAN

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Provincial Reconstruction Team Nuristan was officially inaugurated at Qala Gush in Western Nuristan on November 19. The Qala Gush site is the larger of two temporary PRT sites in Nuristan Province conducting Civil Affairs activities (the other being near Kamdesh in the eastern part of the Province). Speaking at the ceremony, attended by representatives from communities throughout the region, Ambassador Neumann used the occasion to highlight past and current U.S. assistance activities benefiting the province and to underscore the U.S. was committed to Nuristan province and Afghanistan for the long-term. COMISAF GEN Richards, CJTF-76 CG MG Freakley, and Task Force Spartan Commander Col. Nicholson also spoke. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) The PRT for mountainous Nuristan province was officially inaugurated at a ceremony on November 19 at the Forward Operating Base located at Qala Gush, near the Nurgaram district administrative center in western Nuristan. Against a backdrop of Nuristan's peaks mantled by the season's first snows and under a blue sky crisscrossed by contrails from military aircraft, Ambassador Neumann, ISAF Commanding General Richards, CJTF-76 Commander, Major General Freakley, and Task Force Spartan Commander Colonel Nicholson participated in the ribbon-cutting ceremony along with Nuristan Governor Tamim Nuristani. Representatives of the Afghan and international press covered the event. Officials from the three districts in western Nuristan and delegations from communities were also present.

¶3. (U) In his remarks, COMISAF General Richards cited the significance of establishing a PRT in the region. He urged all present to use the winter months to work together in making plans and preparations for stepped-up activities when the weather improves in the spring.

¶4. (U) Ambassador Neumann noted that the inauguration of a PRT in Nuristan was the culmination of a sustained effort over several years. Already present in Nuristan Province, USAID has funded 12 schools and four clinics with a fifth under construction. USAID funded training for the presidential and parliamentary elections. Wheat seed and fertilizer provided by USAID Alternative Livelihood Programs have been distributed in the province and several road

projects are underway. The Ambassador emphasized the U.S. commitment to a secure, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan by working together with the Afghan people. "We intend to be here for a long time," he concluded.

15. (U) An elder from Pashgar village, Nurgaram district, offered his community's welcome to the coalition and international forces in their efforts to rebuild Afghanistan. He called the roads that are being built in the province by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as the most important development for the people of Nuristan. With Nuristan divided into three valleys, these new roads will help overcome the divisions. He praised Governor Tamim for his "sacrifices" for the people of Nuristan. They owe him special thanks, he said. The elder concluded by declaring that the people of Nuristan stand ready to help the international community in developing their province.

16. (U) In his remarks, Governor Nuristani noted that he had discussed the establishment of a PRT in the province with President Karzai who expressed his support. The Governor noted that more than \$40 million has been allocated by the U.S. for roads in the province. In addition, a provincial security center costing 200 million Afghanis (\$4 million) is under construction at the provincial center. He expressed his appreciation for the other PRT facility that was operating at Kamdesh in eastern Nuristan.

17. (U) Following the speeches, the principals joined in cutting a ribbon at the entrance to the base to mark the official opening of the PRT. Governor Nuristani and the representatives from local communities then sat together in a shura where individuals expressed their opinions and concerns

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to the governor. Most speakers complained about the lack of government services, schools, clinics, roads and security, and the protracted absences of government officials from their duty stations. They also lambasted local officials as corrupt and rapacious, not interested in serving the people, and only using their offices to enrich themselves. Several speakers complained to the Governor about his indifference to the region, noting that he had not previously visited during his tenure. The Governor, who listened placidly to the speakers, did not respond to specific criticisms but in response stressed the need to cooperate, particularly on improving security. He urged the people to inform government officials when anti-government individuals and groups were present in the region.

18. (U) The region surrounding the Qala Gush FOB/PRT is sparsely populated and, like the rest of the province, has no population concentration that could be considered larger than a village. The nearest community to the PRT is Nangarach, a settlement consisting of a few dozen houses, a health clinic, the only boy's school operating in the entire province offering 12 grades, and an eight-grade girls' school. The PRT lies adjacent to the only road that affords vehicular access to Nuristan's three western districts: Nurgram, Mandol and Doab. For Afghans, Qala Gush is known as the site where, in February 1919, the Afghan ruler, Amir Habibullah, was assassinated under mysterious conditions while on a bird-hunting expedition from his winter palace in Jalalabad.

19. (U) PRT Nuristan (West) occupies a purpose-built base at Qala Gush in Nurgram district near the district administrative offices. It is the larger of two PRT sites in the province conducting Civil Affairs and the home to the Department of State PRT Officer. The military unit of the PRT at Qala Gush includes Army, Navy and Air Force personnel from both active duty and the reserves. This same team had been located at Tarin Kowt until August 1 when the Oruzgan PRT was turned over to the Dutch. The U.S. forces moved to Qala Gush and began construction on the base in late September.

¶10. (U) The two PRT sites currently in operation in Nuristan Province were established on a temporary basis until a sufficient road network could be put in place to allow unrestricted access to most areas of the province, making a centrally located PRT possible in the provincial capital of Parun, which is located high in a remote alpine valley of central Nuristan. Until the permanent central PRT is established, PRT Nuristan (West) will be home to the main PRT staff, while Forward Operating Base (FOB)/PRT Kamdesh (East) will support a small Civil Affairs Detachment covering Kamdesh and Barg Matal districts. PRT Kunar located at Asadabad continues to engage with Nuristanis from Waygal and Wama districts in central Nuristan.

¶11. (U) COMMENT: The official launch of PRT Nuristan at Qala Gush rather than the provincial center of Parun points to the unique challenges that beset coalition efforts to support strengthening of security and governance functions and accelerating development in this geographically divided province. The move to Parun is not likely to occur any time soon given the need to first build and secure roads connecting the Provincial capital to the rest of the province. While the Qala Gush base itself is temporary, the Ambassador underscored in his remarks that the U.S. has a long-term commitment to Nuristan and to Afghanistan as a whole.
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